

Should Democrats Move Left?

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Body

To the Editor:

"Democrats Brace as Storm Brews Far to Their Left" (front page, July 22) describes the desire by some to move the Democrats farther to the left. This may work successfully in some districts, but it is a misreading of the loss in 2016, and it's magical thinking to see it as a strategy for 2018 and 2020 on a national basis.

What is needed to end the Trump/Republican nightmare is unity on the left and getting out the vote. By not voting for a flawed Democratic candidate in 2016, too many on the left failed to analyze the destruction to our democracy and the harm to those most vulnerable that a far-right victory would bring. Too many on the left voted for a third-party candidate or didn't vote at all; therefore, they had a hand in bringing about the nightmare.

If young voters need to be energized, doesn't all the harm ("zero tolerance" immigration policy, withdrawing from the Iran nuclear and Paris climate agreements, appointment of Justice Neil Gorsuch, etc.) caused since the far-right takeover count?

Jim SalczynskiDetroit

To the Editor:

In the 1970s I was a teaching assistant with David Riesman, the noted Harvard professor and author of "The Lonely Crowd." David was an expert on American society, and the course was based on Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America."

One day while walking together I asked David, "Why are you so cautious, even timid, when you share your own opinions about cultural and political changes?" David stopped walking and made a space about an inch wide between his thumb and index finger. He said: "Civilization is thin! It is thin! It is fragile! When the pendulum of cultural and political change swings too far in one direction, it is bound to return and swing too far in the opposite direction."

This seems like a lesson we all need to consider now. Hopefully there is quite a bit of leeway for strong stances on decent health care and education, fighting racism, and defending democracy and the right to vote. But we may be more successful in rebuilding an American pro-democracy majority if we liberals can genuinely come to respect the many decent white people who are fearful because of the fierce pace of cultural and technological change many of us are experiencing. "Civilization is thin! ... It is fragile!"

William GreenbaumRockport, Mass.

To the Editor:

Should Democrats Move Left?

Polls indicate that most Americans want universal access to health care (including contraception and abortion), affordable higher education and action on environmental issues (especially climate change). How can it be right to characterize Democrats advancing these majority-held goals as "far to the left"?

Allan LeedyPortland, Ore.

To the Editor:

Haven't we learned anything from the extremism on both sides of the aisle that has polarized this country? Democrats can brace for a slaughter if they move far left. It may be fine for some local races, but a presidential candidate needs to appeal to a wide range of people, and both parties need to moderate if sanity is to return to Washington.

The only thing that matters right now is getting Donald Trump out of the White House, and the Democrats' sole focus needs to be winning over his supporters.

Cara SchirrmeisterNew York

To the Editor:

Having grown up in Manhattan as a lifelong Democrat, I have found watching the conversion of Republicans to a Trump party painful. Watching Democrats run to the far left has been just as painful. It leaves Americans with so many bad choices. Would it be too much to request a party with liberal social stances on abortion and civil rights while also showing some fiscal responsibility?

We shouldn't build up deficits like unlimited piggy banks. Entitlement programs need to be addressed, but in a humane and fiscally sound way. The United States should return to being a world leader, with a strong military that partners with allies but does not seek new conflict via Twitter.

Is it time for a third party where moderates from either party can reclaim common sense?

Steve ReichShort Hills, N.J.

To the Editor:

Re "Democrats Are Moving Left. Don't Panic," by Michelle Goldberg (column, July 24):

Ms. Goldberg argues that centrism is not the answer to beating Donald Trump. Well, that depends. The only way to beat Mr. Trump in the near term is to elect a House Democratic majority and Democratic governors who will impose checks and balances. And the only way to do that is flipping areas whose voters support Republicans.

Ms. Goldberg cites national polls showing broad support for various initiatives considered left-of-center. I happen to agree with many of those ideas, but the only poll that counts is in specific states and congressional districts in Ohio, Kansas, Iowa, rural Minnesota, Orange County in California, northern Florida and other areas whose voters are up for grabs this November, and who are unlikely to be grabbed by the left or the right. They want an alternative to Mr. Trump who generally reflects their views.

Steve IsraelOyster Bay Cove, N.Y. The writer, a former member of Congress from New York, was chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee from 2010 to 2014.

To the Editor:

Democrats should panic. Supporting fringe candidates is a big mistake. Michelle Goldberg clearly believes that the vision of the far left is best for America, but not enough people agree, and every time another wild-eyed, wealth-redistributing, Israel-bashing, Euro-loving, border-erasing uber-leftist is nominated, the Republicans pop a bottle.

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The far right and the far left must be marginalized so we can have centrist representation. Other than the inclusion of charismatic independent candidates, the only way to achieve that is for one party to offer voters of the other party acceptable alternatives to their own candidates -- that is, moderates. Much in the same way that nominating neo-Nazis will prevent Democrats from voting across party lines, no Republican is going to vote for a socialist.

The left and the right both need to move to the center, or we'll keep getting extremist candidates. Democrats, if you want Donald Trump for another four years, by all means, keep moving to the left. I'm an independent, so I get to complain no matter what.

Gary TaustineNew York

To the Editor:

Michelle Goldberg stated that "if you truly believe that Trump is a threat to democracy, you should welcome politics that inspire people to come to democracy's rescue."

I did not vote for Donald Trump, but the problem I have with the Democrats' new left is its desire to tell me what is best. That is exemplified by the actions of the California Democratic Party, which is dominated by millennials. Dianne Feinstein won 44 percent of the primary vote, but the California Democratic Party decided to support her opponent, who won only 12 percent of the vote. It believes that it knows better than the electorate. That is autocracy by the left and for the left. That autocracy gives credence to Mr. Trump's position that elites want to take away our individual freedoms and choices.

The Democrats should emphasize common desires and goals, not our differences. From espousing common goals of growing the whole economy, elevating the less fortunate and establishing social justice will come political strength and success.

Stewart B. DunskerCincinnati

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